

Inspired by old finishes she'd studied in Italy, a Maryland interior designer builds a family home for the ages.

# Lasting FINISH

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Reclaimed wood flooring and a custom mahogany table expand on the mood and patina of a bronze doré chandelier and a gilded wood mirror in Arlene and John Critzos' dining room. The walls look as though the patina evolved over decades, but artisan Tom Warnock applied a glaze over wallpaper, then heated the glaze to achieve the crackled finish.



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## Decades before drawing up plans, some interior designers nurture a vision of the home they want for themselves.



**ABOVE:** Gothic-shape windows, varying rooflines, and a combination of stucco and stone lend this new home in Annapolis, Maryland, timeless allure. **OPPOSITE:** A gallery hall on the main level features plasterwork pilasters and ceiling medallions. The terra-cotta urn at the far end is an antique from Pompeii, Italy.

With every project, antiques auction, or country traveled, they accrue incentive for the day of ground-breaking. Interior designer Arlene Critzos traces tendrils of the inspiration for her 17,000-square-foot old-world-style villa near Annapolis, Maryland, to her days as a decorative arts student in Rome. That's when she first saw the effects of time on Italy's stone and painted surfaces. "I witnessed the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, which Michelangelo had painted nearly five centuries earlier, getting cleaned, and I saw the columns of buildings on the Piazza del Puopolo carefully stripped of layers of pollution," she says. "It was a revelation to see how the original surfaces had aged. Nothing could alter the beauty of their essential patina."

Arlene's fascination with all things old-world has inspired the decor for numerous residential projects on four continents, and it served as the foundation for the Chesapeake Bay residence she shares with her husband, John.

"I wanted a dignified European-style house with the patina of age on its wood, plaster, paint, and stone components," she says. "I like living with the authenticity of the old, but I have two sons, and I wanted living finishes that would grow better with time and use."

Working with architect David Riegel, Arlene incorporated antique European architectural elements into the design. A 12x12-foot wall of doors from a French chateau brings stately proportions and the warmth of timeworn walnut to the living room. Old oak milled into floorboards glows in the dining room and in the adjoining hallway, where the wood extends in sections into honed-marble tiles. "Honed marble is more sympathetic to patinaed finishes," Arlene says about the Venatino marble she chose to complement the hall's crème-color cast plasterwork.

In the foyer, soaring ceilings accommodate a Belgian tapestry Arlene was never able to display to its full length in her former home. The tapestry influenced the color scheme throughout the house; its parchment tone translates well to faux-aged paint surfaces, while its green hues inspired a special treatment in the dining room. "I wanted my dining room walls to have the look of a Medici villa from the Renaissance, carefully plastered and painted and then left to the hands of time," Arlene says. Artisan Tom Warnock found a way to distress a patterned wallpaper using a glazing technique that mimics the look of walls in a centuries-old Tuscan villa.

The framework of authentic architectural parts and aged finishes paved the way for a mix of furnishings. "I like everything from old to contemporary as long as the classicism feels right," Arlene says. But the unifying factor is an aura of age. Pointing out the cabriole legs on the living room's reproduction scroll-back sofa, Arlene says: "The finish was scrubbed to look old. Nothing is ever too small to consider."



*THIS PHOTO:* Old finishes on a Venetian tea table, a barrel-back chair, and a bronze sculpture of David build on the patina of the living room's classic architectural features. *OPPOSITE:* Arlene worked with architect David Riegel to create rooms sized to fit large antiques she had acquired over the years, such as the painting *The Apotheosis of St. Francis of Assisi*. The work of art, suspended over a deep Chippendale-style sofa in the living room, influenced the church style of the room's windows.



*"I built patina into the walls, floors, and plasterwork to make the house feel old. A good patina is forgiving of use. A few more nicks only add more history."*

—HOMEOWNER AND INTERIOR DESIGNER ARLENE CRITZOS



*"I acquired large pieces at auction in order to establish the scale and mood of age I wanted for the house."*

—ARLENE CRITZOS

**OPPOSITE:** Italian mosaics embedded in the kitchen's tile floor set off islands designated for eating and serving. Arlene complemented the warm glow of the pine islands with a plaster range hood trimmed in Italian terra-cotta. **ABOVE LEFT:** A carved-wood counter from an 18th-century French butcher shop houses the kitchen sink. **ABOVE MIDDLE:** Arlene commissioned a latch bolt and window grilles to create a noteworthy entry to the wine cellar. **ABOVE RIGHT:** This 19th-century Belgian tapestry determined the height of the foyer walls and the aged tone of the house's color palette. Several sets of antique Italian torchères flank a refectory table in front of the tapestry. **LEFT:** The wine cellar is built of stone and timber to look like a European vintner's cave. A bar inset with wine barrel ends runs the length of one wall.



THIS PHOTO: Twin vanities inlaid with handsome marquetry are tucked into keyhole-shape arched recesses in the master bath. OPPOSITE: A canopy bed typical of European bed chambers anchors the master bedroom. Arlene reversed the pattern on the bed's drapery, facing the smaller toile print to the interior for coziness. A series of cornices superimposed on a toile pelmet forms an alcove under the barrel-vaulted ceiling.

*"I felt it was important to create a clean, simple decor that was also sophisticated. I wanted today's luxuries but with a distinct reference to the past."*

—ARLENE CRITZOS